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Largest biomass plant in North America opens

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The largest 100 per cent biomass power plant in North America has opened in the Canadian province of Ontario.

The originally coal-fired Atikokan Generating Station, operated by Ontario Power Generation, underwent a \$170m (£105m) reconstruction after the Canadian government introduced tougher emission measures.

The station has been re-connected to the grid at the end of last week after a two-year closure.

"A new era has dawned in Ontario; one where the air will be cleaner and the multiple costs of coal-fired generation have become a distant memory," said Canada's Minister of Energy Bob Chiarelli.

"Atikokan's successful conversion to biomass will put Ontario on the world map as a leader in using this sustainable fuel source for electricity production."

Conversion of the station began in mid-2012 and included construction of two silos and boiler modifications to accommodate the biomass. The project employed over 200 highly skilled trades people and technical workers.

Capable of generating about 900 million kW/h of electricity per year (enough to supply 70,000 households), the power plant will provide fully renewable power to cover electricity demand at peak times.

The station, employing 70 full-time workers, will be running on wood pellets made of locally sourced biomass by Ontario-based suppliers.

"Close to 100 per cent of the electricity Ontario Power Generation produces is from sources that are virtually free of climate change or smog causing emissions," said Tom Mitchell, president and CEO, Ontario Power Generation.

"Atikokan GS is a unique addition to our clean energy portfolio as it provides dispatchable renewable energy that can be used when the power system needs it."

The closure of Ontario's coal plants comes as the province moves toward implementing a smarter electricity grid, increasing efficiencies within the electricity system, introducing strong conservation efforts and committing to cleaner energy sources.

Replacing coal-fired electricity generation is the single largest climate change initiative being undertaken in North America. The complete elimination of Canada's coal-fired plants will help reduce carbon emission by an equivalent of seven million cars being taken away from the roads.